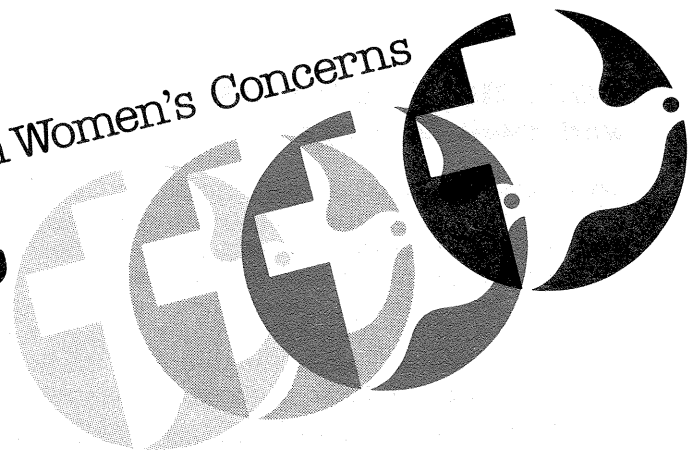


# MCC Committee on Women's Concerns report



Report #51, September-October 1983

## Women's Experiences in Non-Traditional Mennonite Churches

compiled by Janice A. Kreider

"When a community has enough members to do all the work, when it has enough material goods, it can relax. It has strong structures. It is fairly secure. It's then that there is danger." (Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, p. 88).

A number of Mennonites in the past several years have seen this danger of complacency in their established churches and have attempted to form new congregations with fewer members, to promote simpler lifestyles, and to remain open to changes in church structures and style of leadership. We now have a whole array of intentional communities, house churches, and congregations with shared lay leadership. While the majority of North American Mennonites remain in traditionally structured congregations having full-time paid ministers, a growing minority are drawn to the newer alternative settings.

A questionnaire was sent to a number of Mennonite women involved in house churches, intentional Christian communities, and congregations with a shared lay leadership. The respondents' names and the fellowships to which they belong are listed under CONTRIBUTORS on page 2.

The oldest congregation represented is also the most radical in its approach: Reba Place of Evanston, Ill. It is an intentional Christian community, begun in 1958 by a group of Goshen Biblical Seminary students wanting to be part of a radical Anabaptist church in an urban setting. Possessions are shared, and at times all members have lived in household units. (Now there are both communal and noncommunal members.)

House churches consist of a small group of people regularly meeting together for worship, often in a home. These people want to be part of a small but committed congregation. The fellowships have often begun in areas having a large Mennonite population with many traditional Mennonite congregations. Other house churches are urban fellowships and serve as the only Mennonite congregations in their respective areas.

Within these house churches there is much use of lay leadership. Although there may be ordained people involved, there is generally not a paid minister. House churches, like intentional communities, attract people from various Mennonite backgrounds. If the congregation belongs to any of the Mennonite conferences, it usually belongs to several. Since both house churches and intentional Christian communities are beginning to look to other similar groups for intellectual and moral support, networks are now evolving (see RESOURCES, p. 8).

The third type of congregation considered here is the most closely related to a traditional church; only its concept of leadership is revolutionary. Instead of having a paid minister and a board of unpaid lay elders or deacons, it has a leadership team composed of both ordained and lay members, some paid full-time, some part-time, and some not at all. Such boards are not permanent, but change from time to time (e.g., Southside Fellowship of Elkhart, Ind., and Pilgrim Mennonite Church of Akron, Pa.).

In this *Report* we ask: How are women faring in these evolving situations? Do women have more opportunities to take part in the Sunday morning worship service? Are women more involved with the ordinances of baptism and communion? Are there more opportunities for women to participate on church committees? Is inclusive language being used in the services? Are single women welcomed? In general, do women find these newer congregations attractive, and if so, why?

*This issue of Report was compiled by Janice A. Kreider who became a member of the Committee on Women's Concerns in 1982. She is a member of the Mountainview Mennonite Church of Vancouver, B.C., a university librarian, wife, and mother of two grade-school-age sons. She was associated with the London Mennonite Fellowship for one year. For this Report she has taken the questionnaire responses and woven them into the text on pages 3-7.*

## CONTRIBUTORS: The Women and Their Settings

**Lois Bare** works on program interpretation for Church World Service, has done writing for Mennonite periodicals, and is the mother of three teenagers. She is a member of Southside Fellowship of Elkhart, which has a shared lay leadership, membership of 90, and is associated with the Mennonite Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, and Church of the Brethren. It was begun in 1965.

**Bertha Beachy** manages the Provident Bookstore in Goshen, Ind., and was a member of the Committee on Women's Concerns from 1979 to 1982. She spent 20 years in Africa with the Eastern Mennonite Board doing teaching at various levels, literacy work, bookstore operation and church leadership. She is a congregational elder in the Assembly of Goshen, which has lay leadership and which consists of two clusters each made up of a number of small intergenerational groups. The congregation belongs to both the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. It began in 1974 and has approximately 200 members with many scattered around the world.

**Kristina Mast Burnett** is director of Information Services at MCC, mother of a 2-year-old son and infant daughter, and a member of the teaching and pastoral teams at Pilgrim Mennonite Church, a house church which began in 1977 in Akron, PA and which is in the process of joining the Lancaster Conference.

**Hilda Carper** has worked as a teacher, Christian education curriculum writer, and church worker, is single, and has been part of Reba Place since 1966. Reba Place Church is an intentional community in Evanston, Ill. with about 200 members and is associated with the Illinois Mennonite Conference (MC) and the Illinois-Wisconsin Church of the Brethren.

**Fern Hieb** of the St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship is a church musician, a piano and organ teacher, and a mother of two. The St. Louis Fellowship began in 1972 as a small urban fellowship. It now has 40 members and has dual affiliation with the General Conference and the Mennonite Church.

**Jeanne Houser** is a social worker by training, has an infant son, and works as a bookkeeper in the New Creation Fellowship, Newton, Kan.,—an intentional community begun in 1973 and associated with the General Conference Mennonite Church. It has 21 adult members and an attendance of 60-80 on Sunday mornings.

**Eleanor Kreider** of the London Mennonite Fellowship in England is a typical missionary in that she does almost everything: receiving visitors, counseling, teaching, planning worship services, playing music, and being involved in community groups. She is the mother of a teenage son. The London Mennonite Fellowship is sponsored by the Mennonite Board of Missions and is

an intentional (and international) Christian community occupying two houses in north London. It has 32 members.

**Deborah Laws-Landis** has worked with the elderly for five years and is expecting her first child. She has been on the lay leadership team at Pilgrim Mennonite Church, Akron, for two years.

**Miriam Maust** teaches part-time in a writing clinic and is the mother of two teenagers. She is a member of one of the Kitchener-Waterloo house churches.

**Irene Pauls** works with home Bible Study groups geared for reaching out to neighbors and with a soup kitchen. She is the mother of two teenagers. She is a member of the Grain of Wheat Church-Community in Winnipeg, an intentional Christian community begun in 1981.

**Rebecca Pries** is a psychologist, mother of two daughters, and a member of the Mennonite Congregation of Boston which has 30-40 members. It has a lay leadership, was begun in 1962, and is affiliated with both the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church.

**Janet Reedy** is studying at the seminary in Elkhart and employed one-fourth time by her congregation, Southside Fellowship of Elkhart.

**Kathy Royer** is a part-time newspaper reporter, vice chairperson of MCC Peace Section, and the mother of two children. She is a member of Southside Fellowship.

**Irene Wiens** works in an employment training program for native families in Winnipeg. She has studied at AMBS and was a founding member of the Grain of Wheat Church-Community.

**Glennis Yantzi** teaches continuing education part-time for a community college and is a wife and mother. She was part of a communal household for four years and is now involved in one of the Kitchener-Waterloo house churches (of which there are five). They have informal ties with the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec.

**Ruby Zehr** has attended AMBS in Peace Studies, is the mother of two daughters, and was on the leadership team at Southside Fellowship for three years.



*The graphics scattered throughout this issue are by Suelyn Lee, a recent Goshen College graduate. They originally appeared in Weaving Wisdom: Sermons by Mennonite Women (see News and Verbs), and are used by permission.*

## Leadership of the Weekly Worship Service

All respondents indicated considerable flexibility in their congregation's weekly worship services. In almost all instances, this has meant an increased participation of women in the main service of worship. It is common for women to lead the worship and singing. In most cases, women are involved in worship planning. The one area in which women are not yet equally involved with men is that of preaching or "teaching" as it is called in many smaller groups. Eleanor Kreider indicated that women do preach, "but less frequently than might be expected. No one would object, but women aren't geared up for that type of contribution." Jeanne Houser noted that women give the teaching about five times a year. Kristina Mast Burnett reported that "two of our three regular teachers are women."

Miriam Maust described the worship at her house church as follows:

*Since we have centered the main part of our discussion around a study of a portion of Scripture (a book of the Bible, a study of major characters in the Old Testament, a thematic approach to certain biblical passages, etc.), all of us take responsibility from time to time for offering commentaries—our own or from concordance and reference aids. Both men and women share in the leadership, although we have leaned heavily on those (men!) who have received the most training in history and theology. We move from home to home and the format followed is that of a brief meditation by one of the members hosting the meeting*

## Group Leadership Patterns

Creative leadership patterns characterize house churches, intentional communities, and congregations having significant lay leadership. There is a strong emphasis upon the servanthood of these leaders. Although some of the congregational structures appear typical on the surface, there are differences with respect to women's involvement.

Rebecca Pries says that they have one minister, but this person changes yearly and their council membership generally includes 50% women. Kristina Mast Burnett reported they have a four-person administrative council/team and a five-person pastoral team, and at the moment about half of these members are women. Deborah Laws-Landis said: "There are not committees or structures from which women are barred."

Almost all respondents reported more opportunities for women to participate on committees than is typical in traditional Mennonite congregations. This is not always necessarily good news for women, as Kathy Royer noted: "There is no discrimination sexually about who serves on committees. As a matter of fact, at times I have felt that women have borne a heavy burden on committees because of their more flexible schedules."

It appears that many of these congregations are still attempting to work out women's roles in leadership. Janet Reedy:

*(again equally shared by men and women), the Bible study itself, with leaders' comments, and then a general application with all participating in current concerns or questions.*

Clearly, the smallness of this house church encourages significant involvement of all its members.

Glennis Yantzzi, when writing about the Sunday morning service that is attended by members of the various house churches in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, said that women do not preach in that service at present, but this may be changing soon. Hilda Carper reported: "We don't have sermons as such in our services. We do have teachings and women sometimes do them, but more often men."

Ruby Zehr said of Southside Fellowship that "fewer women than men see preaching as their forte." Janet Reedy, also of Southside, stated:

*The person with major responsibility in preaching and teaching at present is a man, but more women than men are involved in planning and leading worship. There has never been any prohibition against women preaching, but there were few who did it until the last few years. That is becoming more and more common and no one questions it.*

Thus we see that women are indeed involved in both preaching and teaching, probably much more so than in traditional Mennonite congregations.

*There is great flexibility in the tasks done by men and women in our congregation. The majority of tasks have been done at one time by a woman and at another time by a man. Our leadership team of four persons has two men and two women at present. There was a time about eight years ago when they were all men, not out of conviction that only men*

*continued*



should have those roles but from default. When there was turnover on the team, some people urged that we give first consideration to women. A woman was chosen and since then the team has always included one or two women.

The last time we chose a new administrator, we discussed the fact that a man has always had this position, and several women were considered, but none of them accepted the job. I don't know whether that just happened or whether women did not see themselves as capable of tasks like financial management and chairing congregational meetings.

I think that both men and women sometimes let self-doubt or self-perceptions stand in the way of accepting a task that they have more often seen the other sex do. As time passes, I see both women's and men's involvements become less tied to role expectations as people keep discerning gifts, stretching themselves, and asking, "Why can't a woman negotiate a contract for renting a building?" or "Why can't a man coordinate the scheduling for the nursery?" We have a commitment to encouraging people to exercise their gifts as fully as possible and to taking seriously people who feel called to a particular kind of ministry.

Hilda Carper also wrote of struggles:

Our congregation of about 200 adults is divided into small groups of 8-15 and into clusters of small groups which function something like house churches. All clusters meet together for Sunday worship. Recently in our reorganization of the church we cut down the size of our body of elders, which had included all small group leaders and was often between 15 and 20 people and had always included a few women. We now have only four elders, whose role is to give oversight to the total church.

We have people in our congregation who feel strongly on both sides of the women-as-elders question, but all of us agree that it is a secondary issue and not one that should cause division among us. We resolved the issue for now by limiting the small group of oversight persons called elders to men, with a small counterpart group of leadership women who meet at

least monthly with the elders to provide women's input into the oversight process.

Eleanor Kreider offered an interesting approach to this problem:

When our congregation was first founded, we couldn't think of such a luxury as arbitrarily eliminating 50% of the people from leadership in teaching, worship leading, etc. Everybody was needed. Only big churches can afford to be blind to the existence of the gifts of such a large proportion of the membership. We have had strong and solid teaching here, establishing the principle that men and women are heirs together of the promise; we are responsible together and will work in the church according to the gifts the Spirit gives.

This does not mean that women will necessarily do things in the ways that men have chosen to do them in the past. Men's ways are not always the ways of women. Certain forms of teaching, styles of communication typical of past approaches need to be supplemented and sometimes replaced as we work out our life together. I feel hopeful that the dynamic and flexibility of our little church will not grow limp or rigid. I hope to see, more and more, the opening up for all of us of forms of life, worship, and hospitality that serve us and our new members better.

Although her congregation has not worked through the issue of women's roles, Irene Wiens felt that simply being in a community has enlarged women's roles:

Being a young community, we have not worked theologically on the issue of the role of women. So we too are challenged to bring to reality there being neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). Yet in practice there are ways in which women's and men's roles are more easily shifted. For example, men and women, servant-leaders too, all take their turns in weekly child care. Roles such as worship leading, teaching or leading out on various task forces can be taken by women or men. There are ways in which our structures and our life together do lend themselves to creating more opportunities for women to take initiative, to take risks of trying out new roles, or to be speaking out from their experiences, insights or learnings.

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## Baptism and Communion

The majority of respondents stated that women participate in the ordinances of baptism and communion, but this is certainly not true for all of the groups surveyed.

Kathy Royer: "Usually there has been an ordained person who performs the baptism, but communion is served by both women and men, lay and ordained." Rebecca Pries said that the benefits of lay participation include "fresh approaches and a greater sense of shared responsibility for the congregation." Hilda Carper stated:

Women do participate in baptisms and in serving communion, although in baptisms they are generally teamed with one of the male leaders. Communion services are occasionally led by women, but more often by a man. There are nearly always women included in the group which serves the elements, however.

Miriam Maust: "About once a month we celebrate communion together. This celebration has been led by the leader-coordinator." That person, as we noted earlier, is often a woman.

It is unusual for an unordained woman to be the one doing the act of baptism, but this was the case for Bertha Beachy who had two people, one ordained, assisting her; "In May I baptized a young woman. That was the first time for the Assembly."

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## Use of Inclusive Language

Most of the respondents indicated that their congregations were aware of inclusive language and that at least some people in the group were attempting to use it and that the congregations were accepting the changes. But the emerging non-traditional congregations do have some difficulty with these changes. Jeanne Houser:

*The members who had had more exposure are accepting it more than others. Some individuals are quite open—others are resistive—probably similar to other congregations. We have changed wording in some songs to be more inclusive. In one instance we reinstated the original male-oriented wording because of the disunity the changed wording caused within the membership.*

People are now realizing that there are several stages involved in accepting language changes. Eleanor Kreider: "I consciously adapt at certain points. I am not radical on this. I don't change pronouns for God, for example." Janet Reedy reported that this issue remains unfinished business in her congregation:

*For some time a number of people have been concerned about exclusive language. However, there had been no congregational discussion of the question and it was up to individual worship leaders to make an effort to use inclusive language.*

*Last fall this came to a head when a number of women were upset by the masculine language used in a communion liturgy borrowed from another tradition. We discussed it at a congregational meeting and found that there were very strong and contradictory feelings on this. Subsequently we had a sermon on masculine and feminine images of God and then devoted the Christian education hour to a discussion on the sermon and our own experience with language. We have not reached a consensus on this but now we share some common background on the subject, have some understanding of each other's points of view, and have a shared desire to keep working on it with understanding and love.*

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## Role Models

Today's children see many women in the workforce, women newscasters, women doctors, women mail carriers, and even some women ministers. The respondents were asked to describe what the children in their congregations would be observing in contrast either to what children in a traditional congregation might experience or what they themselves observed when growing up in their childhood congregations.

Hilda Carper described what a child would observe in her intentional community:

*Because of our close-knit life together, church and daily living are all mixed up together in the children's minds. For the most part, men and women simply do what needs to be done, regardless of sex. When the church gathers, both men and women take care of the children, teach the Sunday school, participate in dance group, music group, plays—sharing in many*

*ways in the worship. At church dinners, men and women alike help with preparation of meals, clean-up etc.*

Kathy Royer said: "Obviously the children see more participation by women in leadership than I saw in my home congregation. I believe that attitudes and values go deeper than that change, however, and I'm not sure that our children are as enlightened as we sometimes wish."

Eleanor Kreider: "I hope they simply see a mutuality, team spirit, and a serving of all by gift and vocation. I hope they don't see power fights and point scoring between men and women." Jeanne Houser has come from a Catholic background and compared that with her present experience:

*In my Catholic background, women were primarily dependent on men (specifically the priest) for mediation and for interpretation of their religious experience. Their roles were rigidly defined—single women (as nuns) had more "spiritual status" and freedom in how they served the church. At New Creation Fellowship, our young people see women working alongside men on specific projects. In many ways they perceive women as having similar gifts and talents as men. However, on a given Sunday morning, most often men are actually serving as worship leaders and teachers. Therefore, children probably perceive men as having more authority and responsibility than women in the actual worship.*

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## Single Women in the Church

How well are single women (and men) integrated into these congregations? Fern Hieb reported:

*Because of the small size of our fellowship, and the feeling of being an extended family, children often sit with adult friends other than family, and the nuclear family does not always sit tightly together. Also, the proportion of singles in our fellowship is large. It is not an oddity to be a single adult woman. It is perfectly acceptable. People are respected as individuals and rarely referred to as "the wife of so-and-so" or "the husband of . . . ."*

Jeanne Houser:

*Since single women are freed from family responsibilities, they may have more time and energy to be involved. We have had many more families than singles in the fellowship, which causes a lack of support for singles, or for specific programs to meet their needs. Single women do have respect in the congregation—which may not always be equally true in some traditional churches.*

Lois Bare: "A number of single and divorced women are part of our church. They have said they feel more comfortable because they see married couples are freer to include them."

Kathy Royer:

*We have recently gained a number of single people. With more singles comes greater variety, and therefore fewer stereotypes. This increase in numbers has*

helped singles to be heard. We have had several six-week Christian education options devoted to singleness. The single people also led the congregation in a worship service that expressed some of their feelings about being single in our society and our church. I am sure that many of the old stereotypes remain, but as in the issue of language, our consciousness is certainly being raised.

Bertha Beachy said:

*We are still a very couple and child-oriented congregation which is a good thing, but there are also singles in the congregation. I do feel a bit of movement, as though singleness may be looked at—but hardly with the same kind of priority as feminist issues which incorporate more married than single concerns. However, the Assembly is, I believe, better than most Mennonite congregations in the area of single issues.*

Irene Wiens spoke as a single person about her experience in community: "In community I have found a stopping place, a spiritual home. I have found a family, sisters and brothers, children, people to be loved by and challenged by. I find that I meet Christ in them. There is the reciprocal sharing needed not only by singles but by the married too." (For another response of a single woman from the same community, see the article by Nancy Sprague, listed under RESOURCES, page 8.)



## Women's Fellowships/WMSC/WM

None of the respondents' congregations has a women's fellowship such as Women in Mission or Women's Missionary Service Commission. Although one can only guess at the reasons, size does seem to be one of the factors. The young average age of the women in these nontraditional congregations (often in their 20s and 30s), their working outside the home and/or caring for young children might not leave enough time for membership in yet another organization.

Are these new fellowships meeting the needs of the women so well in terms of nurture, developing a sense of mission, and being included in decision-making that they feel no need for a women's group? Several congregations did mention that their women sometimes meet informally for Bible study, prayer, or for special meetings on a particular issue, but these do not seem to be on-going groups.

Are women missing something important by not meeting together as their counterparts do in the traditional churches? Are they failing to experience the larger sisterhood that could come with being part of WMSC or WM? These questions need to be faced in the very near future.



## Changes in Women's Involvement

As these congregations become more established, they begin to resemble more closely the traditional Mennonite congregation in size and even structure. This change does not seem to mean that women's involvement decreases as the congregation becomes more established. On the contrary, each of the respondents felt that women's involvement is increasing and will continue to increase. There is certainly a positive feeling about women's participation in these groups.

Irene Pauls: "The women in our church are encouraged to use the gifts they have and to explore whether an interest they have might be something useful in the building of the body." Jeanne Houser observed, however, that women's involvement is sometimes handicapped: "I often sense that the men would be glad for women to exercise more leadership but that the women themselves are hesitant. Because New Creation Fellowship has such a family orientation (many women have used much energy to parent small children), women have declined specific tasks."

Bertha Beachy pointed out that a reason for the increase of women's involvement at Assembly is with seminary training.



## General Observations and Comparisons

Several respondents shared what their church meant to them. Irene Wiens:

*In choosing community, I was needing a place where I could commit myself, as well as a place which offered an outward expression for the reality within me—that of my identity in Christ and the desire to live out more fully a gospel without compromise. The more I had contact with those in religious communities, whether Catholic, ecumenical or those more rooted in Anabaptist influence, the more I was moved by their witness. I had found that to live out a Christian calling from an individual base did not work. In contrast, I am finding that community becomes a context in which one can grow into Christian maturity and in which one can enter into conversion from the ways of the world to kingdom ways. It is my prayer for us women, wherever we are, to experience more deeply the reality of a place meant for us, so that we are able to voice from our hearts: "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land" (Gen. 26:22). Then there will be no inequality or bondage. May we come to find ourselves as the whole persons we were meant to be, and be enabled to give expression to the purpose for which we were created.*

Janet Reedy: "In this congregation I have had the experience of developing a variety of leadership gifts. When I was hesitant about trying something new, I have been given encouragement and opportunity and I have grown a great deal in this setting. Being a woman has not been an obstacle here."

Miriam Maust:

*One of the strongest considerations I have for this type of family worship is its wholeness and unity of young and old. Most of us have long since left off the morning or evening "family worship" period of former days. This house church experience has been a kind of families' worship in a larger sense. It is hard to hide one's true core under that kind of scrutiny. . . Since we had been a part of a nonprogrammed Quaker meeting for about five years, we had some sense that it was possible to grow in a less authoritarian, less structured church environment, and that egalitarian participation often enhances and supports new spiritual investigations. . .*

*One of the most refreshing aspects of the small house group experience is the freedom men and women have to discuss biases and culturally ingrained gender roles. For instance, when we studied Old Testament characters, the apparent paucity of "good" women became an occasion to note humorously and seriously the lack of female roles in religious life from our very Judeo-Christian origins. The distrust of her motives, her abilities, her leadership capacities is still evident in lesser forms! I would miss the freedom to express frustration informally to a sympathetic group; at least, in the past I have not found the setting for it in the traditional service.*

The last question posed in this survey was: If you were to return to a traditional congregational setting, what would be your key reservations and to what sorts of things would you look forward with anticipation?

Some of the things these women felt they would not look forward to included the lack of a strong support group, fewer creative possibilities for worship and service, formality, inflexibility, getting lost within the larger membership and in numerous functions that separate members of the family, being less involved—less a crucial part of the congregation. Jeanne Houser made this statement.

*Worship would be more formal, less personal, more distant. I would not be as challenged to live simply and to follow the Lord in a daily way. I would not be as accountable. It would be easier to be even more materialistic and individualistic. I would miss out on the fun and joy of being family together as we are at New Creation Fellowship—through good times and difficult times.*

Some of the women did have things they would look forward to in returning to a more traditionally-structured congregation: fewer idealistic expectations, a larger church school program for the children, keeping in touch with larger church happenings, meeting more people, "full-house" hymn singing, more structure (because constant evaluation and change can be exhausting), being less involved and less responsible, anonymity, less expenditure of emotional energy due to living less closely and intensely with others, being more free to choose how to dispense money and time. One person mused that it would be a nice vacation to attend a traditional church and be able to let others do the work!

## Summary

This issue of *Report* has looked, hopefully in a positive way, at women's experiences in a number of nontraditionally-structured congregations. In carrying out this brief survey, we encountered instances of unqualified acceptance of women's use of their gifts as well as frustrations when these gifts were not always appreciated. It must be recognized that these various types of house churches and fellowships would not meet the expectations of everybody in our conferences. There are probably many women and men who would feel uncomfortable if asked to take an active part in such an intense group; some would feel threatened by the demands these groups might require in time and participation. Fortunately, many women are obviously happy within their larger Mennonite congregations, find the necessary support of a small group there, and are able to utilize their gifts within their congregations.

On the whole, it appears that the experiences of women in the nontraditionally structured congregations are beneficial both for the women themselves and for their congregations. These churches are stronger as a result of the women's participation. Such congregations as these are providing their women with the support of a caring community. Changes can, of course, be made more easily in these smaller evolving groups of Christians, and certain of these innovations may eventually be adopted by the traditionally-structured congregations as they also attempt to utilize women's spiritual gifts more fully to the glory of God.

## Resources

Many of the items listed below are concerned with nontraditionally structured congregations in a general sense. Very little has been published so far solely on women's experiences within these groups.

### Books

Banks, Robert J. **Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting.** Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980. Paul described the early church communities by using the images of body and family. Chapters cover the physical expression of fellowship, gifts and ministry, charisma and order, and women's roles. A good, in-depth introduction to the first structures of the early church.

Gish, Art. **Living in Christian Community.** Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979. Practical advice and theological reasons for living in a Christian community. Gish is part of New Covenant Fellowship in Athens, Ohio.

Jackson, Dave. **Coming Together: All Those Communities and What They're Up To.** Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship Press, 1978. A sequel to *Living Together*.

Jackson, Dave and Neta. **Living Together in a World Falling Apart: A Handbook on Christian Community.** Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974. A readable account of how the Jacksons got involved at Reba Place after visiting other Christian communities. Contains rationale for living in community and many practical examples and suggestions about the role of family, sharing goods, etc.

Vanier, Jean. **Community and Growth: Our Pilgrimage Together.** Toronto: Griffin House, 1979. This book is a gem. It needs to be read slowly with the reader savoring each paragraph. Anyone involved in a small church setting would find it helpful. Vanier writes from his experiences in l'Arche, now a network of therapeutic communities.

### Periodicals

**Coming Together** began in February 1983 and is published bimonthly by the Fellowship of Hope for the Shalom Covenant Communities. Themes of recent issues have included the Shalom Covenant Communities, what membership in a community means, and community and mission. Future issues are planned on family life and singleness and international communities. It is available for \$6 a year from 414 W. Wolf, Elkhart, IN 46516.

**Grassroots** is a bimonthly publication of the Post Green Community in England (a member of the Community of Communities) and is available for \$4.65 a year from Celebration Publishing, 57 Dorchester Road, Lytchett Minster, Poole, Dorset, England BH16 6JE. It is like a "U.K. *Sojourners*."

**House Church Newsletter** is a quarterly that has been going for about five years. It contains news of Anabaptist-related house churches, intentional communities, and small fellowships, and information about the house church retreats. It is published by the Commission of Home Ministries of the GC Mennonite Church. Subscriptions are \$3.50 a year from Box 964, Hesston, KS 67062.

**The Other Side** is a monthly publication with social justice concerns and evangelical and Anabaptist roots. There are frequent articles on intentional communities. The April 1982 issue had four articles with the joint title: "Christian Communities: Not All They're Cracked Up to Be." It is published by Jubilee Fellowship, 300 W. Apsley St., Philadelphia, PA 19144 and costs \$16.75 a year.

**Seeds** is a Canadian periodical committed to the restoration of Christian community. The Grain of Wheat Church-Community is sponsoring it. A regular feature is "Community Column." It is a quarterly costing \$10 (Can) a year. The address is 150 Canora St., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 1T2.

### Periodical Articles

Harder, Keith. "Problems of Community Living," *Seeds* 1(4): 7-8, Fall 1981. Harder (Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart) brings the perspective of over a decade of experiencing community life to his descriptions of some problems which arise in community living: the necessity of self-sacrifice, structural problems and changes, relationships of families to the community, stages of development including disillusionment, and problems with outreach and service. Harder's conclusion is that Christian community is a miracle and a testimony to God's love and power.

Miller, Marlin E. "The Recasting of Authority: The Biblical Model for Community Leadership," *Sojourners* 8: 24-27, Feb. 1979. Four aspects of the biblical model are identified: all members of the church have a particular gift, one such gift is leadership, the New Testament describes major characteristics which a leader should have, and the leadership should be exercised in the context of mutual subordination. The article is oriented to house churches. Miller is active in the Assembly at Goshen, IN.

Peter, Karl and Whitaker, Ian. "The Changing Roles of Hutterite Women," *Prairie Forum* 7(2): 267-277, Fall 1982. The Hutterite concept of God as the collective saviour of the community is being affected by the idea of God as an individual's personal saviour. The women tend to be more attracted to this concept than men are, and this affects their self-perception and self-awareness. Other changes for women have included a decline in the birth rate, the adoption of labor-saving devices, more pride in personal appearance, more involvement in organizing their own work schedules, less communal work, and engaging in income-producing home industries. None of the changes have affected the authority and power structures, however.



Rozen, Frieda Shoenberg. "The Permanent First-Floor Tenant: Women and Gemeinschaft." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 51: 319-328, Oct. 1977. Rozen studied the role of women in four communal societies: Amish, Hutterites, Chassidic Jewish groups, and the Kibbutz. In all of the groups women are occupationally segregated and a subordinate group. Although the groups try to remain separate from society, there is a narrow stairway to the larger society, but its access is blocked for women, who remain confined to the intimate group. Rozen suggests that this blocking of access to women insures the continuation of the *gemeinschaft* and questions if the maintenance of the *gemeinschaft* is dependent on the greater restriction of some members than others.

Sprague, Nancy. "Singleness and Commitment." *Seeds* 2(3): 14-15, Mar. 1983. Her view is that community provides a context in which a single person can live a fulfilled, happy life. It is a place where traditional barriers between marrieds and singles can be broken down. She emphasizes that belonging to a community requires a permanent commitment. Sprague first became part of the Reba Place and is now a member of Grain of Wheat in Winnipeg.

## Letters

I am grateful for the opportunity to offer some elucidation in view of the response to my essay, "Two Faces of Women: Witch and Mystic."

First, I submit that a careful reading of the essay would indicate its intent: to redress the injustices associated with the first image (witch) and to salute the "second sex" for what may in fact be its primary role—that of the mystic.

Witch and mystic were historically, I submit, *two faces*. That is, the magical and the authentic mystical are to be contrasted, as I have done in *Masks of Satan: The Demonic in History* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1983).

Witchcraft is certainly distinguishable from the demonic, but even a "laundered," white witchcraft is normally regressive and the way to obscurantism, if not apostasy. If witchcraft could be relatively innocent among the primitives, the words of Christ (John 15:22) would seem pertinent to contemporaries: "If I had not come, if I had not spoken to them, they would have been blameless."

Certainly I would admit to the "feminine" in the Godhead, which is ultimately trans-sexual, and would support theologians who have reinterpreted the Holy Spirit as feminine. "Goddess theology," in which there are the dabblers and the doctrinaire, is a more complicated thing.

Goddess theology is also, I submit, regressive, and if women have been second class citizens in Christian history, it may be instructive to observe that they have been fourth class citizens in terrain where the goddesses flourished, e.g., ancient Greece. My reference to the subject was associated with radical feminists, such as exemplified in their foremost theological spokesperson, Mary Daly, who has gone *Beyond God the Father* to outright caricature of Christ himself, e.g., "the swinging single hanging from the Cross."

No doubt such outrage proceeds from some deep hurt, and I, for my part, will condone neither.

## Networks

**Community of Communities** began in 1976 as a network of American and British communities of diverse origins, including Anabaptist. Sojourners Fellowship of Washington, D.C. is one of the communities. Representatives of the communities meet annually, and there are some regional gatherings. For more information see Sabath, Bob, "A Community of Communities," *Sojourners* 9: 17-19, Jan. 1980 and *Seeds* 1(4): 9, Fall 1981.

**Shalom Covenant Communities** is a network begun in 1974. Members include Reba Place, Plow Creek, Fellowship of Hope, New Creation, Austin Community Fellowship, New Covenant Fellowship, Marian Mennonite Brethren, Broadway Baptist, Brookside Fellowship, Leavenworth Fellowship and Grain of Wheat. There is sharing of spiritual gifts, people, financial resources, and there is an annual conference. For more information see articles in *Coming Together*, Feb. 1983 and *Seeds* 1(4): 9, Fall 1981. The network sponsors *Coming Together*. A list of active house churches, fellowships, and communities with Mennonite connections is available without charge from the Mennonite Community Association, 414 W. Wolf, Elkhart, IN 46516.

Meanwhile, as we work out our agenda for authenticity, we might keep one eye on the historic feminine mystic who, if she were inauthentic, never knew it. This, too, I have tried to say.—Donald Christopher Nugent, University of Kentucky.

I had many mixed emotions on reading the issue "Women and the Word: The Interpretive Intrigue." I was saddened by the low view of the inspiration of Scripture held by the writers—all of them either learners or teachers at one college and seminary. Yet I was encouraged by the hope that this forthright exposure might alert some who, not willing to throw away their faith in the authority of Scripture, had not before seen the shaky ground on which much of so-called "biblical feminism" stands. . .

It's clear that Jesus revolutionized the New Testament community in recognizing that women are in no way inferior to men—fully and totally equal before God and ideally, before humankind. But it is also clear that to try to "tack on" to that equality the idea that there is no distinction between the roles/gifts of men and women in the home and church is to go beyond what Jesus modeled in his ministry and is obviously contrary to some clear apostolic teaching.

I enjoyed Waltner's look at Romans 16—a passage that always excites me to see the great potential in the church when both men and women become active in the work God has called them to. But why try to squeeze more out of this passage than Paul put in it? Both attempts to make Phoebe a commander (*prossaso*) rather than a helper (*prostatis*) sound convincing until you look at your Greek lexicon. There you will see that these two words are not derivatives of one another (as Waltner said they were), and that non-biblical use of *prostatis* does not have leadership connotations (which Greek scholar do you choose to believe?).

Finally, one important point Waltner must have forgotten to include is that Phoebe was not only a *prostatis* of the church, but of Paul as well (v. 2). Was she his leader, commander, overseer? Or was she one who cared for him and helped him, giving her time and resources to meet the needs of others?—Dan Bumstead, Logsden, Oregon

Friends,

In doing my filing, I find I am missing *Report* numbers 43 and 47. Could you send me copies of those two items? I think you are doing a good work on your *Report* and in the whole area of women's issues.

We are involved with a THEOS group, that is, a self help group for widowed persons (male & female). I am often impressed with the way women discover new strengths and resources in their lives when forced singleness by death causes them to take new roles. Have

you done anything with the topic of women facing life after spouse's death?

For your section on "News and Verbs", I'd like to note that Nettie Goerz, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario is the leader of a new THEOS self help group for widowed persons, in the St. Catharines area.—*Fred Unruh, pastor, Grace Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ontario*

## Women at Bethlehem: Some Impressions

"Things are calmer than last time, but what does it mean?" That observation and question lingered for both General Conference and Mennonite Church feminists after the joint Bethlehem '83 gathering in eastern Pennsylvania August 1-7.

"Last time" for General Conference women was three years ago at Estes, when the dearth of women's names on the ballot prompted feminists to submit a substantial list of women's names from the floor—and many of them got elected.

"Last time" for the Mennonite Church was two years ago at Bowling Green, when an ad hoc group of women called an early morning meeting closed to men by advertising in the women's washrooms and when women in great numbers spoke their feelings on "women in ministry" during the floor discussion of the study paper "Leadership and Authority in the Church." This floor discussion led to the passing of a resolution to set up a committee to "study and facilitate the process of the full participation of women in the leadership ministries of the church"—a resolution which caught some leadership persons offguard. (This watchdog committee, chaired by Emma Richards, was renewed for two more years at Bethlehem.)

Were things "calmer" this time because concern for women's issues had become institutionalized in the meantime, and are working themselves out through "regular channels"? Or, conversely, had feminist women effectively been "silenced," as some suggested? Or, was it a funny combination of both?

The statistics on women's involvement point in more than one direction and, as usual, can be analyzed in various ways. The program committee obviously heard the request that women be more involved in seminar leadership, for instance. Of the 120 seminars offered, 21 were led solely by women, and 22 others were jointly led by a woman and a man—a noticeable "improvement" since "last time." Six seminars were listed under the heading "women's concerns." Topics ranged from "Women and the Bible" by Mary Schertz to "New Images of Women" by Anna Bowman and Ruth Krall to "Women in Leadership Ministries" by Norma Johnson and Joyce Shutt—and the seminars were well-attended.

One could also point to more women on the slates presented by the nominating committees since "last

time." Of the 33 persons elected to Mennonite Church boards, 13 were women; of 22 persons elected during General Conference proceedings, 7 were women. (Mennonite Church helps its delegates make some decisions about male/female balance, by presenting a pool of four women candidates at certain places on the ballot and saying, "Elect 2.")

But one could only puzzle over the fact that the women delegates (or at least the MC women, number-in-28% of the MC delegates) were very quiet on the conference floor this year. And one couldn't help but speculate about one of the new bylaw changes—the one which limits floor privileges for MC non-delegates to the moderator's discretion (and in effect, whether or not in design, contributes to the silencing of women's voices).

At this Assembly, the MC moderators did in fact permit non-delegates to speak at some point during every discussion. But this time during a floor discussion on the human sexuality study paper, a group of 20 women presented a statement of concern via a male delegate, rather than trusting the system to let them speak for themselves. . . .

One could also talk about the attempts at inclusive language in worship, symbolized, most clearly by the new songs in the *Assembly Songbook*. One could be thankful for the strong presence of Mary Oyer as song leader, for Esther Wiebe as composer of the closing cantata, "That We May Be One," for the other women who contributed in innovative and powerful ways to the worship experience.

One could observe the space in the display area given to WOMENSAGE and to our own MCC Committee on Women's Concerns—and the display space *not* given to the Brethren/Mennonite Council on Gay Concerns.

One could celebrate with WOMENSAGE, the WMSC, and WM the publication of three significant books. WMSC gave thanks for Elaine Sommers Rich's *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness 1683-1983*, which they had commissioned and which has sold out its first Herald Press printing in a few short months. WM unveiled Cornelia Lehn's new collection of mission stories, *I Heard Good News Today* (Faith and Life). And the WOMENSAGE booth displayed and sold a tastefully designed book of sermons by contemporary Mennonite

women, *Weaving Wisdom*, edited by Dorothy Yoder Nyce (see News and Verbs below).

One could marvel at the quilts that adorned the corners of the Stabler Arena, especially the tricentennial quilt with 510 hand-appliqued pieces in a fraktur motif created by retired English professor A. Grace Wenger.

Here one could choose one's own most comfortable style of sisterhood. One could identify with WMSC or WM—not closed to men, but not attended by them either. Or one could attend the two closed Women's Caucus meetings held throughout the week—a situation that caused consternation for some. And of course one could create one's own informal sisterhood—like the three high school “best girlfriends” who found themselves in a “communal hug” on the sidewalk one day.

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## News and Verbs

**Thelma M. Groff**, Goshen, IN, is writer of this year's WSMC Devotional Guide on the theme of “Hope.” Thelma is co-director of Field Education and Spiritual Formation at AMBS.

**Gerda Krause** of Vancouver has been appointed member-at-large of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee (PSCC) of MCC Canada.

**Katie Funk Wiebe** gave a major address, “Nurturing into Body Life,” at the Virginia Conference (MC) sessions July 16. She also spoke to 240 women at the prayer breakfast the same day.

**Phyllis Cole**, a student at Goshen College, won first place in the 1983 C. Henry Smith Peace Oratorical Contest with her oration entitled “Requiem for Hamelin's Children.” She urges listeners to examine the innocent-sounding language used by the military to disguise its real intentions and effects. Second-place winner is **Kathleen Kern** of Bluffton College, for an oration entitled “On Women of Peace and their Inferiority Complexes.”

Two innovative approaches to the marketing of SELF-HELP Crafts are happening in Henderson, NB and Ephrata, PA. **Marion Friesen** recently expanded her SELFHELP business from the basement of her home to a Phillips 66 station at the Henderson exit of Interstate 80. And in Ephrata, **Donna Snyder** and **Martha Lobe** have opened a tea room in a corner of the SELFHELP store, where teas, spiced coffees and snacks such as frozen yogurt shakes and pita bread are served. Both women have served in countries where SELFHELP Crafts are made.

Bridgework Theater of Goshen, IN performed the play “Waiting on the Outside,” which portrays the conflicts between prisoners and their wives, at the Indiana State Reformatory at Pendleton on July 16. Research for the play included interviews with 26 wives of prisoners in six states. Project coordinators were **Janet Reedy**, **Kathy Royer**, and **Howard Zehr**, all of Elkhart. For

One cannot stop without remembering the hard work of the women on the local arrangements committees—women like Ethel Clemmer and Shirley Lapp who ran the pie booth; who frequently left home at 6 in the morning to start the first 100-cup coffee perk and didn't return home till midnight; who each day arranged for up to 100 shoofly pies and 30 dozen donuts—received from women in local congregations and from home bakeries.

One left Bethelhem '83 with a renewed sense of sisterhood—a sense that the gifts of many sisters are being called upon and celebrated. But one also left with that nagging thought, “Yes, things are calmer than last time, but what does it all mean?”—*Sue Clemmer Steiner*

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more info contact Bridgework Theater, 113 ½ East Lincoln, Goshen, IN 46526.

**Carol Ann Weaver**, composer and music teacher in Waterloo, ON, writes in the May/June/July 1983 issue of *Festival Quarterly* that “Except for theology no discipline has been so guarded from women over the centuries as has Western music.” The article is the first of a series entitled *Since Eve: A Journey in Sound*.

Just released by WOMENSAGE are *Weaving Wisdom: Sermons by Mennonite Women*, edited by **Dorothy Yoder Nyce** of Goshen; and *Mennonite Women's Calendar 1984-86*, with **Christine Kaufmann** and **Priscilla Stuckey Kauffman** as project coordinators. In *Weaving Wisdom*, 36 contemporary Mennonite women preachers have submitted sermons and litanies on the



themes of "Spirituality," "Justice," and "Story." The Women's Calendar contains information on over 400 women from the 16th century to the present, and from every continent. WOMENSAGE also has available various occasional papers with titles such as "Intersection: Feminist and Mennonite Theologies" by Mary Schertz and "A Model of Ministry for Women and other Feminists" by Lois Barrett. To order any of these, write to: WOMENSAGE, Fatima Retreat Center, Notre Dame, IN 46556.

Updated information about plans for women at the **1985 Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg** includes these highlights: 1) the Program Committee is now composed of one-half men and one-half women; European women have been an important part of the planning process; 2) there is a commitment to use women in major speaking assignments; more names of qualified persons are welcome; 3) an interest group open to everyone will be offered on the topic, "The Role of Men and Women in the Church"; 4) a "Women's Resource Center" (or "Freuentreff") will be set up in the main lobby of the convention center, shielded by dividers from the traffic flow; it will also have a sign saying "Open to All"; 5) men and women will serve in pairs as leaders of all discussion groups.

The **MWC Travel Fund** goal is \$100,000 to subsidize the expenses of 125 persons. If women's groups raise funds designated for Third World women, the organizers will make sure that the number of women equivalent to the amount of these "designated funds" will be included in the group of 125. WMSC plans to contribute \$2,000 to the travel fund; WM will also be coordinating a fund drive. To make suggestions to the

planning committees, write to Paul Kraybill at 528 E. Madison St., Lombard, IL 60148.

The Administrative Committee at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries is evaluating the idea of establishing a "Women in Church and Mission" Chair at AMBS. This proposal would speak to the need for a Mennonite woman's perspective on church history, on Christian feminist theology, and on women's contributions to mission and congregational life—needs which various persons have identified at the seminary. The Administrative Council seeks counsel on such questions as: whether there is support—moral and (especially!) financial—for this idea, and how the chair/professorship could best be shaped and named. Write to Jacob W. Elias, Dean, 3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517.

If you have news and verbs that you would like to share with the other 2,000 readers of *Report*, send them to Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

Forthcoming *Reports* will focus on:

Nov.-Dec. 1983 Women and Aging

Jan.-Feb. 1984 Women and Home Missions

March-Apr. 1984 Women and Third World Development

May-June 1984 Impact of Childbearing/Childlessness on Women's Lives

The *REPORT* is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

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